

MINUTES – BOARD OF ASSESSORS MEETING, 12/6/04

In attendance: **Board of Assessors:** Denis O'Regan, Chair; Walt Borders, Brooke Bovard, Jane Frantz, Tom Frantz, Laura Wallace.
Absent: Larry Walker.
Public: Charlie Robinson, Nanette Robinson.

Denis O'Regan called the meeting to order at approximately 7:30 p.m.

Minutes: The first order of business was a review of the minutes taken by Larry Walker at our first meeting on 11/30/04. Denis suggested that the Board review the minutes, make any changes, and then vote to accept or reject them before we proceed with other business. Denis drew our attention to the sentence in the first paragraph of second page which states, "It should be mentioned that all Board of Assessors Meetings are open, and visitors can be invited to speak, or voice their concerns." Denis wished to emphasize the word "can," stating that although all of our meetings are open to the public, it is up to the Board to decide if and when members of the public in attendance will be invited to speak and on what topics. He was also concerned about the term "Open Meetings" in the last sentence of the same paragraph, stating that he views all the Board meetings as open. After some discussion, it was agreed by everyone that the sentence should be changed to read, "At the *public hearings*, visitors are welcome to address the Board; regular meetings of the Board generally follow public hearings, and the public is welcome to attend but the right to speak will follow the rules of recognition used at regular meetings." Denis solicited input from the other Board members, and Jane Frantz offered some written additions to the record (attached). After discussion, it was agreed that the additions should be made part of the minutes. Denis suggested that we keep more detailed minutes; he will check with Larry Walker about how to proceed. Denis called for a vote on accepting the minutes with additions.

Voting to accept the minutes: Walt Borders, Denis O'Regan,
Laura Wallace, Tom Frantz, Jane Frantz.
Abstaining: Brooke Bovard.

Assessors' Website: Walt Borders said he had talked to Danny Schweers about setting up a website for use by the Board of Assessors. Larry Strange owns the website (theardens.com) and has already posted some Assessors-

related items to it. The site can be accessed through the Arden Club website and using a link to “Assessors.” Walt said Larry’s only concern is that items not be posted to the site just because it’s there, taking up valuable space. Walt volunteered to master this link for the Board of Assessors. The Board then discussed again the idea of posting minutes from our meetings on the website. **Brooke** suggested that a summary of the minutes be posted on the site with a link that can be used to access the full minutes, that way we can avoid taking up that valuable space. Denis polled the group, and it was agreed that we should begin posting our minutes on the web. Denis wanted to know from the Board how fast out the minutes should go up on the website. **Brooke** suggested that Larry Walker get the “preliminary” minutes to all Board members within a couple of days after each meeting; we should review them and send Larry our comments or changes within a couple of days after that; then, the vetted minutes should go up on the website. Denis pointed out that the Board can set its own schedule; we are not obligated to the community to do so within 4 days. Tom Frantz said we could post unofficial minutes by the weekend after our meetings; they could then be commented on in same the manner that Danny Schweers uses for the Town Meeting minutes. The “official” minutes would be what’s left after all our comments and changes are made. Walt said he is OK with that suggestion.

Agenda Items: Denis had three items he wanted to address: 1) the “Green Book,” which was handed out at the first assessors meeting, and how to handle it as we move forward, focusing on policy rather than content; 2) everyone’s issues regarding what they want to accomplish as a member of the Board; 3) setting an agenda for our next meeting.

1) The Green Book – Denis’s thoughts: how do we get the Green Book into the Board of Assessors archive? How do we validate it for future use? In addition to the seven Green Books given out to Board members, there is an 8th copy for the Board’s secretary to use for archive purposes. Denis felt the full Board should decide what items become part of the “official,” archive Green Book. Both Tom and **Brooke** expressed a desire to use their copies as “working copies” that they can mark up as they wish; Laura agreed. It was decided that our own copies are ours to use as we see fit. Denis suggested we go through all seven Green Books at the end of our term and mine them for things that should go into the official copy. As an aid to us and to future Boards, Denis asked Jane to write an “operations manual” section on how to use the green book; how to decide what goes into it. **Brooke** thought the Green Book was a great resource to have, and, if we

update it as we go, it will be evident how our discussions led to the decisions we've made. A discussion followed about the possible need to amend the Act to Reincorporate to require future boards to keep a master copy of the Green Book. Brooke said that is a matter for the Legislative Reference Committee, and the state legislature would need to be involved as well. Tom remarked that Cecilia Vore told the Budget Committee that changes can be made to the Charter if enough people feel strongly about it. Tom thought we won't have time as the 2005 Board to accomplish changing the Act and suggested including that recommendation as part of a supplemental report along with our final report to the Town Assembly in June. To summarize: Denis listed three conclusions regarding the Green Book: a) we make no formal changes to it except as approved by the whole Board; b) our copies are working copies; c) we hope to pass our Green Book archive down to future Boards and require them to keep it and add to it, by amendment to the Act to Reincorporate if needed. Denis will look into how changes are made to the Act and how difficult it would be to make any; he feels that this Green Book is a real contribution our Board can make to the Community. Finally, Brooke suggested that a copy of it be kept in the Arden Archives and in the Arden Library.

2) Our Issues – Denis asked each Board member to make a statement of his or her ideas and tell us what they want to accomplish.

Denis: The Green Book is one contribution we can make. Changes to the land rent rate may not be able to be made this year unless we get a consensus from the Community. The rates we have now need a legal basis. A land rent study would need to be a budget line item if we were to get serious about accomplishing it.

Walt: Agreed with Denis's thoughts. He asked if we could track down the person who wrote the Illinois Real Estate Letter (part of the Green Book) and see if we can consult with him and find out if he has any more data. Walt believes that people should understand their land rent bills in detail; that the bills should be itemized so people can see what percentage they pay of the community standard of living items. He also believes residents should know the history of our land rent system. We are not a rural community anymore. We should set monetary and financial responsibility according to the type of community we are now, how we live today. He expressed doubt about whether we have the "political capital" to make wholesale changes, but through education we can probably get people to make the changes we

need to our land rent system. People's motives in voting in November's referendum may have been a desire to overturn something that seemed **WACKY**, rather than to make big changes to the status quo.

Tom: Thought it would be hard to make changes to the land rent calculations this year, but there are a lot of people who don't know what the effects of those calculations are, what land rent is for, how it is spent, etc. We should put that information out there. Fundamental education is the first step. Full rental value means you shouldn't underpay or overpay for land rent. He wants to understand the relationship between the bills coming in from the County; what is for land versus what is for improvements. He noted that some leaseholders are charged fractions of the location factors, but those fractions are being applied without documentation by any Board of Assessors. This probably results from a spreadsheet created in the past and that continues to be used. He also wondered about tax rebates and how they are handled; how are they accounted for in land rent assessment? Tom feels the Board of Assessors has a significant role in the community. The Trustees, however, seem to look at us as just a rate-setting committee. We are more than that. We need to know, and have a right to know, what the Trustees are doing with our land rent money.

Brooke: Ran for the Board because the Community she grew up in was at loggerheads (due to the land rent controversy resulting from the 2004 Board's actions). Brooke believes it is OK to have a philosophic basis for changing assessments, so long as it is not the wrong philosophic basis. She felt that last year's Board of Assessors had worthy goals but poor information. She wants to find some middle ground in a community that is upset.

Laura: Was impressed by the work of the Fair Land Rent Neighbors. She felt that the previous Board of Assessors' changes were not fair. It was just wrong to act without facts. In the five years she has lived in Arden, she feels she sees the same people on the Board (and other committees) all the time. She believes change was needed, and the upheaval of this past year may have actually had a good effect in the end. Her belief, based on attending classes, is that Georgism in Arden is not pure Georgism. It has been compromised by many decisions made by the Community over the years. Because we were willing to compromise our version of Georgism (with the consent of the Community), our outlook on assessment needs to

compromise, too. Laura believes that our work as Assessors needs to have a real-world basis.

Jane: Ideally, would freeze the land system in place for the next year; probably two years. That freeze would allow time to conduct a comprehensive land rent study, calling on the advice of outside experts (such as the guy from the Illinois study) as well as tapping the resources of our own Community, which contains a wealth of knowledge and institutional perspective. She would hold meetings with the entire Community at which everyone would be allowed to express their opinions and ideas on land rent assessment. The goal would be to have several land rent assessment plans presented to an ad hoc committee which would evaluate them and present the best, most viable, plans to the Community. The Community would then vote on these plans, and the one receiving the most support in open competition would be the one to go into effect from that point on. Jane believes that after 104 years, it is shameful that we do not have a firm land rent system in place; one that is fair and equitable to all leaseholders. It is time to change that.

Brooke suggested that one way to accomplish what we all seem to want is to amend the Act to Reincorporate to change the terms of the Assessors so they last more than one year. Her suggestions was to put the Assessors on a rotating election schedule similar to the one used by all the other committees in town.

3) Next Meeting's Agenda – Tom suggested that because County property and school taxes make up such a large part of our total land rent, we need to better understand how those taxes are billed and paid. Also, he thinks we need to discuss the term “full rental value” and what it means. **Brooke** agreed that we need to track the money. She suggested that our first “exterior act” should be to ask the Trustees for information. She made a motion, as follows:

“The Board of Assessors, in order to fully discharge their sworn duty to determine full rental value, are formally requesting the Trustees to provide the most recent tax records to and from the County and welcome any or all of the Trustees to our January 10, 2005 meeting to explain them. The information requested includes, but is not limited to: school taxes, property taxes, supplemental assessments, and land taxes.”

The motion was seconded by Denis and then passed unanimously. Denis will send a letter to the Trustees, including our motion, requesting one or all of them to come to the January 10th Board meeting to give a presentation and answer questions.

Next Meeting: It was agreed that our agenda for the next meeting will include two items: the Trustees' presentation, and our report to the January Town Assembly. Denis noted that ALL Board of Assessors meetings from now on will begin at 7:30 P.M. A motion to adjourn was made at 9:40 P.M., seconded, and unanimously passed.

Respectfully submitted by,

Jane Frantz
Acting Secretary to the Board of Assessors